

Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Empires

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The twelfth to the ninth centuries BC in Mesopotamia are considered a dark age, because very little is known about that time period. From the thirteenth century BC to the middle of the sixth century is called the iron age with increasing use of that new technology. A powerful Elamite kingdom led by Shutruk-nahhunte and his son Kutir-nahhunte conquered several hundred settlements and captured Babylon, ending the Kassite dynasty and taking away the statue of Marduk in 1157 BC. Kutir-nahhunte died about 1140 BC and was succeeded as king of Elam by his brother Shilkhak-Inshushinak, who used Babylonian tribute to build up their capital of Susa. Shilkhak launched military campaigns against Aramaean settlements to the west and north along the Tigris River. The 46-year reign of Ashur-dan was ending with a struggle for power in Assyria. Ashur-resh-ishi (r. 1133-1116 BC) claiming to be the "avenger of Assyria" strengthened their defenses, rebuilt the palace, and repaired the Ishtar temple.

A new Babylonian dynasty emerged in Isin; Nebuchadrezzar I (r. 1124-1103 BC) attacked Elam and, after an early defeat and plague, triumphed and regained the statue of Marduk. However, his attacks against Assyria were successfully resisted. Both the Babylonians and the Assyrians fought against the Lullubi tribes in the eastern hills and the nomadic tribes in the western deserts. Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser I (r. 1115-1077 BC) defeated the Mushki, who were invading the Tigris valley from the north. Tiglath-pileser also led his troops to the west as far as Lebanon. However, these victories were not followed up with effective imperialistic administration, as the Aramaeans were able to fight back later. Tiglath-pileser entertained himself hunting big game and claimed he killed 920 lions. He organized water projects and collected literature in the world's oldest extant library. Tiglath-pileser did attack Babylon and plunder it, but withdrew.

For the next two centuries Assyria and Babylon co-existed. In the eleventh century BC Nebuchadrezzar I was celebrated in an epic poem; Sinleqeunnimi of Uruk produced a humanized version of the [Epic of Gilgamesh](#); and another poet expressed the workings of divine justice, an important concept in Babylonian religion. Tiglath-pileser's son Ashur-bel-kala (r. 1074-1057 BC) fought with Babylon against the Aramaeans, but Ashurnasirpal I (r. 1050-1032 BC) could not preserve the conquests of his famous grandfather; his prayers lamented his adversity and asked for forgiveness for not teaching his subjects to reverence God sufficiently. Assyrian laws were stricter and their treatment of women worse than among the Babylonians, [Hittites](#), and Israelites. In Assyria women could be divorced for no reason without being given any money, could be killed or maimed for adultery, and had to wear a veil outside the house, except for prostitutes who were forbidden to wear a veil.

Assyrian Empire

In spite of the efforts of Assyrian kings Tiglath-pileser II (r. 967-935 BC) and Ashur-dan II (r. 934-912 BC), the Aramaeans had spread around the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. In his reign (911-891 BC) Adad-nirari II fought numerous military campaigns of expansion and made a treaty with Babylon that lasted eighty years. His son Tukulti-Ninurta II began reporting hostile attacks as justification for his campaigns and rebuilt the walls of Ashur. Continued expansion by his son Ashurnasirpal II (r. 883-859 BC) used extensive cavalry, battering rams, cruel treatment of defeated enemies, deportation, plunder of precious metals, horses, cattle, and sheep, followed by bureaucrats and annual tribute to create an empire. Ashurnasirpal rebuilt Kalakh and made it his capital; 69,574 guests attended the opening ceremonies at his new palace.

Ashurnasirpal's son Shalmaneser III (r. 858-824 BC) conquered northern Syria but was unable to take Damascus, though Israel's King Jehu paid him tribute. In Babylon Marduk-zakir-shumi called upon Shalmaneser and the Assyrians to help him establish his kingship against a challenge by his younger brother, who was defeated by Shalmaneser's army in 850 BC. Shalmaneser went on to defeat and take tribute from the Chaldeans and plunder the land of Namri. The next year Shalmaneser led an army of 120,000 against Arzashkun, the capital city of Urartu's King Aram (r. 858-844 BC) and killed 3400 troops.

Aram was overthrown by Sarduri I, whose dynasty in Urartu lasted a quarter of a millennium. Urartu kings Menua (r. 810-785 BC) and Argishti (785-753 BC) expanded the Urartu kingdom, the latter bragging about the number of men killed and animals stolen. Urartu king Sarduri II (753-735 BC) claimed he captured 21,989 people from north of Mt. Ararat, but he was defeated by Tiglath-pileser III in 736 BC.

At the end of his reign the crown prince rebelled against Shalmaneser; the dying king turned to his younger son who became Shamsi-Adad V, won the civil war with Babylon's help, and reigned for a dozen years, ungratefully attacking Babylon and the Chaldeans. Shamsi-Adad's queen Sammuramat, the legendary Semiramis of Greek historians, ruled as regent (or at least was influential) for her son Adad-nirari III who in 806 BC invaded Syria and collected tribute from the Neo-Hittites, Phoenicians, Philistines, Israelites, and Edomites. After Adad-nirari III died in 783 BC, his four sons ruled in succession; but none of them were noteworthy until the fourth, Tiglath-pileser III, became king of Assyria in 745 BC, though some believe that he was not a royal son but a general who took power by force.

Tiglath-pileser III conquered the Syrian allies of Urartu at Arpad and the Medes on the Iranian plateau, declaring that he "smashed them like pots." Then he turned their lands into Assyrian provinces, reorganized the army by replacing conscription with permanent contingents from around the empire, and broke the power of the lords by reforming the administration into smaller districts directly accountable to the king. Massive deportations were used to break up regional loyalties. In 744 BC 65,000 Iranians were displaced, and later 154,000 were moved. 30,000 Syrians were sent to the Zagros mountains, while 18,000 Aramaeans from the Tigris area went to northern Syria. Such policies increased the hatred of Assyria, and thus rebellions would continue in the years ahead anyway.

A siege against Urartu failed, but Tiglath-pileser III returned to the Mediterranean to defeat a Philistine revolt led by Askalon and Gaza and to collect tribute from Ammon, Edom, Moab, and Judah. When Judah's King Ahaz asked for Assyrian aid against Damascus and Israel, Tiglath-pileser captured Damascus and half of Israel while establishing Hoshea as king in Samaria. When a Chaldean gained the throne of Babylon, Tiglath-pileser removed him and in 728 BC made himself king of Babylon; but he died the next year.

Tiglath-pileser's son Shalmaneser V was king of Assyria barely long enough to besiege Samaria for three years. The deportation of 27,290 Israelites was supervised by his successor Sargon II (r. 721-705 BC). Sargon may have had to struggle to get the throne, because he thanked the citizens of Ashur for helping him by exempting Ashur and Harran from the taxes imposed by Tiglath-pileser, and he punished "6,300 criminals" of Ashur by sending them to Harran. Assyria's growing empire had interfered with the trade routes and made enemies of Urartu in the north and Egypt, who supported numerous rebellions in the years ahead.

Before Sargon could consolidate his power, the Chaldean Marduk-apal-iddina II (Merodach-baladan in the *Bible*) had taken the throne in Babylon. Assyria's first attack on Babylon was defeated by Elam. A decade later Sargon attacked the cities of Kish, Nippur, and Dur-Atkhara, while the Babylonian-Elamite coalition fought a guerrilla defense from swamps, flooded areas, the hills, and the tribal peripheries. Abandoned by Elam, Marduk-apal-iddina eventually surrendered at his tribal capital of Dur-Yakin, which was destroyed. Sargon deported more than a hundred thousand Aramaeans and Chaldeans to western Asia, cooperated with the priests, stayed three years governing the area, and imported foreign captives.

Sargon II put down Egyptian-supported revolts in Syria and Palestine, and he conquered the independent city of Carchemish, making it an Assyrian province. In 714 BC after a long march through the mountains of Kurdistan, Sargon led a surprise attack on Urartu, causing their king to flee. He persuaded his army that an eclipse of the moon was not a bad omen for them but for their enemy at Musasir, Urartu's sacred city, which they then easily plundered. Sargon had tens of thousands of workers build his own capital just north of Nineveh, but before it was finished he was killed fighting in Iran. His son Sennacherib believed Sargon's death was a punishment from the gods and left his corpse unburied.

Sennacherib left Sargon's new city unfinished and built a huge palace at Nineveh. Marduk-apal-iddina once again assumed the throne of Babylon but was forced to withdraw when Sennacherib and the Assyrians defeated a coalition army of Babylonians, Aramaeans, and Elamites, deporting 208,000 Babylonians. Bel-ibni was appointed king of Babylon in 702 BC; but two years later when he seceded from the Assyrian empire, Sennacherib replaced him with his son Ashur-nadin-shum. In 701 BC Sennacherib defeated a coalition of Phoenicians, Palestinians, and Egyptians in Syria. Judah's king Hezekiah bought off Sennacherib with 300 talents of silver and 30 of gold. When Sennacherib came back, probably late in his reign, Hezekiah, advised by Isaiah, did not surrender, and the Assyrians withdrew the siege probably because of a plague, though the number of 185,000 Assyrian dead in the Biblical account is probably an exaggeration.

Sennacherib ordered the building of a fleet of ships in Nineveh, and in 694 BC they attacked Elam on the Persian Gulf. However, the Elamites counter-attacked, took the throne of Babylon,

and the war went on for seven years. After a great battle which the Assyrians claimed was a victory although it probably was not, Sennacherib ordered the destruction of Babylon and even plundered its temples, a serious offense to Assyrians, who shared many religious beliefs with the Babylonians. Then a myth was developed that the god Marduk himself was brought before a tribunal for his transgressions, and in the Babylonian creation story *Enuma Elish* Marduk was replaced by Ashur. In 681 BC Sennacherib was assassinated in a temple of Ninurta at Nineveh, probably by his eldest sons. Many believed that Sennacherib had mistreated the god Ninurta as well as Marduk and that his death was a divine punishment, a belief ironically he had held about his own father's death.

Appointed by the imperial council and supported by the army, a younger son of Sennacherib named Esarhaddon became king, while his older brothers fled to Urartu. Esarhaddon ordered the rebuilding of Babylon, the restoration of its gods, and made a peace treaty with Elam, although later his messengers attempting to collect taxes from the impoverished Babylonians were pelted with clods. In the north Esarhaddon fought off the Cimmerians and then made peace with them by giving his daughter in marriage to the Scythian chief Bartuta. When Sidon revolted in 677 BC, he tore down the Phoenician city, beheaded its king, deported the inhabitants, and gave Sidon's territory to its rival city of Tyre.

These measures enabled Esarhaddon to pursue his major ambition of conquering Egypt. His first attempt failed, but in 671 BC the Assyrian army besieged revolting Tyre on the way to capturing Memphis. The Ethiopians were deported; the collection of tribute from Egypt's 22 provinces was organized; and the worship of Ashur was instituted. However, two years later the Ethiopian king of Egypt, Taharqa, who had fled to the south, organized a rebellion. Esarhaddon was on his way back to Egypt when he died in 669 BC. Three times the superstitious Esarhaddon had substituted temporary "kings" so that he could pretend to be a peasant and escape bad omens such as a lunar eclipse, which astronomers could predict. Putting to death the substitutes at the end of their term and attempting to fool the gods insulted his religion. Esarhaddon did make it clear in his treaties with vassals that when he died the crown prince designate Ashurbanipal was to be obeyed.

The best educated and most literate of Assyria's kings, Ashurbanipal ruled for 42 years during the height and greatest decline of the empire. He began by sending an army to Egypt to recapture Memphis. Once again Taharqa fled to Thebes, and twenty-two native kings and governors appointed by Esarhaddon who had fled the rebellion were reinstalled. However, when their conspiracy with Taharqa was discovered, they were exiled to Assyria and executed there, except for Necho, who was set up in Sais to rule Egypt. When Taharqa died, his nephew Tanutamen marched from Thebes to Memphis where in 664 BC he killed Necho and defeated the Egyptian princes of the Delta. When the Assyrian army returned, Tanutamen retreated from Memphis to Thebes from which he fled when it was destroyed by Ashurbanipal's army. Necho's son Psamtik was appointed ruler in Sais. According to Herodotus a decade later Psamtik aided by Ionian mercenaries expelled the Assyrians from Egypt while Assyria was battling Elam.

Tyre was besieged until its ruler Baal submitted and offered his daughter and nieces and much treasure to the Assyrians. Elam had attacked Babylon in 664 BC; but eleven years later when Ashurbanipal would not surrender the Elamite king's rivals, another attack by the Elamites was defeated by the Assyrian army. The king of Elam was killed in battle, and Ashurbanipal replaced

him with his rivals. In 651 BC Ashurbanipal's brother Shamash-shum-ukin, who was king of Babylon, tried to form an alliance with Phoenicians, Philistines, Judah, Arabs, Chaldeans, Elamites, and even Lydia, and Egypt, closing the gates of Sippar, Babylon, and Barsippa to the Assyrians. Ashurbanipal besieged Babylon for two years until Shamash-shum-ukin set fire to his own palace and perished. Ashurbanipal made Kandalanu (possibly another name for himself) king of Babylon and then attacked the Arabian rebels in the desert. So many camels were captured that the price of a camel in Assyria dropped to less than one shekel.

By 639 BC Elam was completely devastated, its capital at Susa destroyed and plundered. Salt and thorny weeds were scattered on their land, and Elam's 3,000-year-old civilization would never rise again. Ashurbanipal marched in triumph with three Elamite princes and a king of Arabia harnessed to his chariot. Jews, Aramaeans, and Lydians had been subjugated, and Assyria was rich with plundered booty. Yet the annals of Assyria came to an end in 639 BC; apparently they did not like recording their defeats. Within thirty years the Assyrian empire would be no more.

The Medes attacked Assyria, but the northern Scythians saved Nineveh and forced the Medes to pay them tribute for 28 years. When Ashurbanipal (and Kandalanu) died in 627 BC, his son Ashur-etil-ilani fought a civil war with his brother Sin-shar-ishkun. The Chaldean Nabopolassar took the throne of Babylon in 626 BC and according to one chronicle fought with Sin-shar-ishkun for two years before the latter became king of Assyria in 623 BC. For a dozen years Babylon and Assyria fought each other. The Medes led by Cyaxares tipped the balance and in 616 BC attacked Nineveh but were beaten back by the Scythians. However, in the next two years the Medes conquered Arrapkha and Ashur. When the Medes joined with the Babylonians to attack Nineveh, Assyria's attempted alliance with [Egypt](#) was too late. By the end of 612 BC Nineveh and the major cities of Assyria had been destroyed. Ashur-uballit II replaced the dead Sin-shar-ishkun and retreated to Harran; but two years later this city was destroyed, and by 609 BC the remaining Assyrian army capitulated.

Probably the most significant piece of Assyrian literature was the epic of "Erra and Ishum." Ashurbanipal and his scholars certified this work, which was probably written or given its final form around 700 BC when Assyrians were attacking Babylon. Its fierce warlike qualities typify the most salient feature of Assyrian culture. Even the hero Ishum, who finally manages to lessen the warmaking somewhat, is referred to as a "pious slaughterer whose hands are adept at carrying his furious weapons and making his fierce axes flash!"¹ The seven gods express the love of battle when they speak to Erra, whose heart already was urging him to make war.

Why do you stay in town like a feeble old man?
 How can you stay at home like a lisping child?
 Are we to eat women's bread,
 like one who has never marched on to the battlefield?
 Are we to be fearful and nervous as if we had no experience of war?
 To go on to the battlefield is as good as a festival for young men!
 Anyone who stays in town, be he a prince,
 will not be satisfied with bread alone;
 He will be vilified in the mouths of his own people, and dishonored.
 How can he raise his hand against one who goes to the battlefield?

However great the strength of one who stays in town,
How can he prevail over one who has been on the battlefield?²

Nevertheless Ishum reprimands Erra for planning evil for the gods in plotting to overthrow countries and destroy their people, asking him to turn back. Bragging of his powers and explaining that Marduk has neglected his word, Erra promises to overwhelm the people of Marduk (Babylonians). Yet the setting up of weapons of the privileged men is described as an abomination to the gods Anu and Dagan. Ishum asks Erra if he does not fear Marduk and says that he has changed his divine nature and become like a human. He has taken his weapons into Babylon like a braggart to seize the city. He has ensnared them in a net and destroyed them.

The army saw you and donned their weapons.
The governor, who had treated Babylon well, became enraged,
Directed his troops to loot like enemy looters,
Incited the leader of the army to crime,
"You are the man whom I shall send to that city!
You shall respect neither god nor man.
Put young and old alike to death.
You shall not leave any child, even if he still sucks milk.
You shall pillage the accumulated wealth of Babylon."³

The great lord Marduk saw and cried, "Woe!" clutching at his heart. An insolent governor was set over them who would not treat them kindly. The warrior Erra put to death the just and unjust. The people abandoned justice and turned to atrocities. Erra declares that the Subartians, Assyrians, Elamites, Kassites, Suteans, Gutians, and Lullubeans have not even spared their own kind as brother even slays brother until an Akkadian shall rise up and fell them all and shepherd the rest. Ishum pleaded with Erra that he rest, and finally Erra was placated and left a remnant. This poem portrays the bitterness of the battles between the Assyrians and Babylonians at this time.

Another pessimistic literary work is a dialog between a master and his servant in which the master proposes to ride to the palace, to dine, to hunt, to lie in wait for his adversary, to build a house, to remain silent, to start a rebellion, to love a woman, to sacrifice to his god, to give food to his country, to help his country, and finally to kill his servant and then himself, but each time he changes his mind and negates the plan, except for the last. Then the servant asks if his master would want to live even three days without him.

Assyrian civilization was focused around its powerful king with a militaristic hierarchy supported by officials, artisans, farmers, and slaves. The king was chief judge, lawmaker, commander-in-chief of the army, and head of the religion, although he was not deified himself. Established traditions and customs stabilized the culture and the king. The only revolutions in Assyrian history were by powerful generals or palace officials, as the social hierarchy was never seriously challenged. Governors and priests, in fact any official, could be directly ordered by the king. Kings and officials need not be literate, because they all were assisted by scribes. Offices and professions tended to be hereditary, or appointments were based on patronage. Aramaeans did rise to high positions, but the process took generations.

Social classes were rigidly determined by one's position in the hierarchy. Captives in war and debtors were made slaves, though the latter could marry a free person, testify in court, conduct business, and own property. Women were entirely dependent on their male relations, raised the children and cared for the home, and were not even allowed to associate with males who were not relatives. If a man lived with a widow for two years they were considered married. Adultery could be punished by the husband killing both or mutilating the wife and castrating her lover; though if he did not punish the wife, the lover could not be punished either. Homosexuality, which was tolerated in Babylon, was punished by the Assyrians. The king maintained a harem of women and eunuchs. Foreign princes and nobles were also kept in the Assyrian court to assure treaties.

Laws operated primarily by the decisions of the king and officials based on precedents. Contracts were made on tablets. Prostitution was allowed but not common; drunkenness was discouraged; theft was limited; and violence and murder were usually settled by private vendetta. A few people were imprisoned but usually for political reasons. The economy was primarily based on agriculture supplemented by crafts, trade, and tribute and plunder from war, though the movement of wealth from the periphery of the empire to the center tended to cause misery and rebellions. All land was considered the property of the god as represented by the king, but in fact temples, wealthy lords, and private individuals did own land or held it in exchange for performing some service to the state.

In war the Assyrians excelled in developing siege engines, and numerous horses were requisitioned for their chariots and cavalry. Cities were persuaded to submit, and excessive cruelty of those who resisted was calculated to make others submit more readily. As the empire grew, more foreign troops filled the ranks of the army. Hunting of lions, wild bulls, and elephants was so popular that elephants became extinct in the area.

Most of the gods were adopted from the Babylonians except for Ashur, the supreme god. Ishtar was the only goddess if one does not count the consorts of the gods, but she too could be warlike. The use of divination for guidance regarding the future was used extensively by Assyrian kings. Astrological astronomers made detailed observations and attempted to correlate human events with celestial signs. Their calendar became quite accurate when they figured out they could add seven lunar periods every nineteen years; they could predict eclipses. Astrology still allowed for divine and human initiative.

Medical theory was based primarily on the belief that disease was a punishment inflicted by the gods on humans for their sins, although dust, dirt, food and drink, as well as contagion were taken into consideration. Physicians attempted to diagnose the symptoms and might prescribe drugs, poultices, enemas, or a change in diet. Libraries of cuneiform tablets were kept, and Ashurbanipal in particular gave instructions to gather any tablet that could be found.

Assyrian society was fairly stable itself, but continued conquest and the imperial exploitation of other peoples eventually brought about its inevitable reaction.

Babylonian Empire

The Chaldean dynasty founded by Nabopolassar when he became king of Babylon in 626 BC was to rule over the empire they took over from the Assyrians when they defeated their army in 609 BC. This king had declared his son Nebuchadnezzar crown prince when the renovation of the palace was celebrated early in his reign. Father and son were together when the last Assyrian king surrendered at Harran. From there Nabopolassar went to Babylon, while Nebuchadnezzar seized and burned forts and gathered much booty for three months. Then the king marched up the Euphrates to set up garrisons against the expected Egyptian attacks, while the prince raised support for this war from the temple authorities. When the Egyptians did invade, killing intervening Judah's King Josiah along the way, Nebuchadnezzar took command of the army and, in a battle in which Greek mercenaries fought on both sides, defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish in 605 BC, allowing "not a single man to escape to his country." He was in the west asserting control over this part of the empire when Nabopolassar died. Nebuchadnezzar immediately marched through the desert and was crowned king in Babylon three weeks later.

Nebuchadnezzar II returned to Syria to collect tribute from Damascus, Tyre, Sidon, and Jerusalem while destroying rebellious Ascalon. In 601 BC the kings of [Egypt](#) and Babylon fought a great open battle that was costly for both sides. [Egypt](#) retreated from Asia, and the Babylonians had to spend a year re-equipping and retraining themselves, while Jehoiakim of Judah abrogated the obligations that had been imposed by Babylon. The Babylonians raided the Arabs in the desert and got the Aramaeans, Moabites, and Ammonites to invade Judah. Then Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem and captured the city and its king in 597 BC. Zedekiah was appointed as regent, and 3,000 Jews were deported to Mesopotamia. Encouraged by Egyptian operations against Gaza, Tyre, and Sidon, Zedekiah revolted against Babylonian hegemony. Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem again as he had a decade before, and after eighteen months Zedekiah was captured trying to escape. His sons were killed; he was blinded and deported with thousands of Jews. Jerusalem was looted; its walls were broken down; and the temple was destroyed.

Less is known of the later years of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. In 585 BC he mediated a truce between the Medes and the Lydians, and it was said that his siege of Tyre lasted thirteen years. He did claim to have pacified Lebanon so that he could exploit its timber, and Egypt was invaded in 568 BC. Nebuchadnezzar II had Babylon rebuilt and ruled for 43 years until his death in 562 BC. He claimed to have been a just king and to have suppressed bribery to please the god Marduk and better all peoples.

Nebuchadnezzar's son Amel-Marduk ruled for only two years, but according to *Jeremiah* 52:31-32 he released Judah's king Jehoiachin from prison and gave him a seat of honor in Babylon. A leading official and landowner named Neriglissar, who had married Amel-Marduk's sister, organized a conspiracy that overthrew the king. Neriglissar led military campaigns against Piriddu in Cilicia but died in 556 BC. His son ruled only three months before he was slain in turn by a conspiracy led by Nabonidus, who was chosen king.

Nabonidus may have helped mediate the peace between the Medes and Lydians in 585 BC. His mother was devoted to the moon god Sin at Harran, lived to be over one hundred, and was given

a queen's funeral in 547 BC. Nabonidus continued the effort of Neriglissar to defend Syria from northern invasion, bringing 2,850 captive slaves back to Babylon to rebuild its walls and restore the temple of Sin at Harran. By divination he decided to dedicate his daughter as a priestess at Ur. Although he did shift religious emphasis to Sin, he still provided supplies to the temples of Marduk and Nabu. While campaigning in Amanus he gathered plants for Babylon's famous hanging gardens that Nebuchadrezzar had built. Nabonidus spent ten years at Tema in the Arabian desert putting down a rebellion and controlling the region, not even leaving to attend his mother's funeral. While he was away, his son Belshazzar ruled in Babylon.

Finally after a drought, divination and abundant rainfall showed favorable omens, and Nabonidus returned to Babylon. Sin was restored to his temple at Harran, and Nabonidus celebrated the New Year's festival in Babylon, taking the hand of the statue of Bel (Marduk) to show his divine kingship. Then Cyrus II of Persia launched a victorious attack on Babylonian Opis. Nabonidus fled, and two days later, Persian forces having redirected the water, charged into Babylon through the dry channels; then Gutu governor Gubaru entered the city without a battle. Belshazzar was killed, and Nabonidus surrendered. The holy places were protected, and two weeks later Cyrus entered Babylon proclaiming peace to all the people and giving audience to the rulers of the former Chaldean empire. Cyrus claimed that he was fulfilling the will of Marduk, reaffirmed the privileges of Babylon, ordered exiled deities returned, and decreed that the Jews would be allowed to return to their country.

These privileges were granted to citizens of sacred cities such as Babylon, Sippar, Nippur, and Borsippa as the Assyrians had done with Ashur and Harran. These urban dwellers believed that their cities were protected by the god of their temple and that if the king violated justice, he and the land would be punished, as indicated in the following Akkadian text from the seventh century BC:

If a king does not heed justice,
 his people will be thrown into chaos, and his land will be devastated.
 If he does not heed the justice of his land, Ea, king of destinies,
 will alter his destiny and will not cease from hostilely pursuing him.
 If he does not heed his nobles, his life will be cut short.
 If he does not heed his adviser, his land will rebel against him.
 If he heeds a rogue, the status quo in his land will change....
 If the sons of Nippur are brought to him for judgment,
 but he accepts a present and improperly convicts them,
 Enlil, lord of the lands,
 will bring a foreign army against him to slaughter his army,
 whose prince and chief officers will roam the streets like fighting cocks.
 If he takes the silver of the sons of Babylon
 and adds it to his own coffers,
 or if he hears a lawsuit involving men of Babylon
 but treats it frivolously,
 Marduk, lord of heaven and earth, will set his foes upon him,
 and he will give his property and wealth to his enemy.
 If he imposes a fine on the sons of Nippur, Sippar, or Babylon,
 or if he puts them in prison,
 the city where the fine was imposed will be completely overturned
 and a foreign enemy will make his way into their prison.
 If he mobilized the whole of Sippar, Nippur, and Babylon,

and imposed forced labor on the people,
exactng from them corvée at the herald's proclamation,
Marduk, prince of the gods, the prince, the councilor,
will turn his land over to his enemy
so that the troops of his land will do forced labor for his enemy,
for Anu, Enlil, and Ea, the great gods, who dwell in heaven and earth,
in their assembly affirmed the freedom
of those people from those obligations.⁴

The people's sense of their own rights and power are seen in a letter that warned Assyrian king Esarhaddon by quoting the opening and closing lines from this text. This is the same Esarhaddon whose tax collectors were pelted with clods. Another document has Esarhaddon claiming that he restored this lost protection and privilege to the people of Babylon which included tax exemption.

Because of the survival of cuneiform clay tablets much is known of Babylonian business transactions during this period. Citizens of these cities, who were exempt from military conscription and corvée, met in assemblies, but after attainment of the empire royal power dominated the assemblies. Nabonidus may have done much to stop judges from taking bribes and not defending the poor, robbing of the weak, usury, violence, and even the taking of fields. These assemblies often settled minor civil and criminal cases. In 594 BC the Borsippa assembly executed and confiscated the property of a general for plotting against Nebuchadrezzar. The local governor usually presided over the assembly. Only free men were in the assemblies that excluded foreigners as well as slaves and women, though poor artisans were included.

Many aliens lived in Babylonia, intermarrying and being assimilated or forming their own self-governing communities. There were Elamites, Persians, Medes, Cilicians, Jews, Ionians, and most numerous of all, Egyptians. Conflicts over ethnicity or religious differences were not apparent. Most aliens worshiped their own gods and the Babylonian gods as well with the notable exception of the Jews.

The king appointed judges to administer the laws. Polygamy was rare, and the husband had to pay the first wife compensation unless she was childless. Women could engage in contracts and own property, though they were rarely witnesses to contracts. Seals or thumbnail impressions were used as signatures. Loans were secured with either fields, houses, slaves, children, cattle, money, or other possessions; these might be exploited in place of interest which was usually 20% annually. A debtor might have to work off the debt but could not be made a slave, although his children could. This desperate measure rarely occurred except during starvation due to famine, a long siege, or a devastating war. The time limit for slavery in Hammurabi's code had been abolished. These laws were still copied though, and the thirty-fold payment for stolen temple and palace property was still in effect.

The state got revenue from taxes, and the temples received tithes which averaged about ten percent of income. The Eanna temple of Uruk owned more than 5,000 cattle and over a 100,000 sheep. Those who could not pay the tithe might borrow it or even give their children to the temple as slaves. Scribes served not only government administration but as business accountants as well. In 553 BC Nabonidus appointed a royal commissioner in the Eanna temple to make sure that the state got its taxes from the temple. Temples also had to provide services to the palace,

and the king began to regulate temple rations to slaves, salaries, and rental rates. Such policies may have induced the priests to prefer Cyrus to their own king.

Barley and dates were the largest crops, and people were often paid in these. The state owned and controlled the canals used for irrigation. The owner of the land usually received one-third of the crop leaving two-thirds for the lessee. Most craftsmen worked for the temples or the wealthy who could afford to train slaves. Most farmers worked on land belonging to the state, temples, or the wealthy.

The king usually gave prisoners of war over to the temples to be used as slaves. However, the 10,000 Jews and their women and children that were deported in 597 BC were not enslaved but settled near Nippur to work land that had been neglected. There was a limit to how many slaves could be absorbed into the economy effectively. Slaves could earn and own property including even other slaves, but they could not buy their own freedom. Only their master could free them, and successful slaves were usually kept. The wages of the slave went to the master, removing the incentive the free worker had to work hard, thus making slavery less productive.

Babylon was the busiest center of trade at this time connecting Egypt, Phoenicia, and Syria to Cyprus, Asia Minor, and Elam. Weighed silver was the primary currency, as there were no minted coins. In the sixth century BC while most people were suffering hardship, powerful capitalists arose, particularly the Egibi family in Babylon, with fortunes in real estate, slaves, money-lending, commerce, agriculture, and banking. These inequities were probably factors in Babylon's loss of political autonomy.

Zarathushtra

Zarathushtra is said to have lived 258 years before Alexander. Since Alexander had taken over the Persian empire by 330 BC when Darius III died, and as Zarathushtra was about forty years old when he converted King Vishtapa and lived to be 77, the approximate dates of his life are 628-551 BC. Other traditions hold that he was born long before that, and some scholars believe he lived between 1400 and 1200 BC. It is also possible that there could have been more than one Zarathushtra. Little is known about the life of Zarathushtra who was called Zoroaster by the Greeks, but his influence on Iranian religion was very great. The name Zarathushtra has been translated as "he of the golden Light," and legend indicates that as a child he glowed with radiant light.

The Aryans, who settled in Iran and those who invaded India, shared a common religion originally, as indicated by a Mitannian treaty with Hittites from the 14th century BC which acknowledged the Vedic gods Mitra, Varuna, Indra, and the two Nasatyas. The names Mitra and Varuna were often linked together in the Hindu *Vedas* as a dual compound. The Iranian god Ahura shared the characteristics of the early Varuna, and Zarathushtra added the attribute of wisdom (*Mazda*) and declared that the one true God is Ahura Mazda. Apparently when the split occurred between the Hindus and the Iranians they eventually demonized some of each other gods and spirits. The divinities the Hindus call *devas* became evil spirits or devils to the Iranians and Zarathushtra, while the Hindus called evil spirits *asuras*.

According to tradition Zarathushtra was born smiling or laughing as the third of five sons in the Spitama family in the pastoral Median town of Rhages near what is now Tehran; he was initiated into the priesthood at age fifteen. He left home on a spiritual quest when he was twenty and at thirty recognized the Wise Lord (*Mazda Ahura*) when Good Thought (*Vohu Manah*) came to him and asked him who he was. Zarathushtra declared that he was a foe to the Liar and a supporter of what is right. Zarathushtra criticized aggressive violators of order as followers of the Lie, and his teachings were opposed by the religious authorities. Zarathushtra was tempted to give up his new faith but continued on with great determination. For ten years he wandered around with very few followers.

Traveling east as he preached, Zarathushtra struggled for two years to convert a Chorasmian prince named Vishtapa. Opposed by greedy Karpan priests and critical of their corruption, intoxicated orgies, and animal sacrifices, Zarathushtra was put in prison until he was aided by Vishtapa's consort Hutaosa; then Vishtapa accepted the new faith and promoted it actively. The court of Vishtapa was drawn into the religion, Zarathushtra marrying a daughter of one of the nobles whose brother married Zarathushtra's daughter by his first wife. The new religion was promulgated so actively that two holy wars were fought in its defense, and in the second one Zarathushtra was killed at the age of 77 while attending a fire ceremony.

The teachings of Zarathushtra were passed down through the ancient poetry of the *Gathas*. Zarathushtra declared that there is one God, the Wise Lord he called Ahura Mazda, transforming the polytheism of the Aryan religion into monotheism. This God he identified as the creator and governor of the universe through the Holy Spirit. The most important characteristic of God is *Asha* which means truth or what is right (justice, law). This God is profoundly ethical, rewarding the thoughts, words, and actions of the good, and bringing recompense to those of the evil. All spirits and beings are free to choose between the good and evil. The twenty names Zarathushtra gave to God are I am, Giver of Herds, Strong One, Perfect Holiness, All-Good, Understanding, Having Understanding, Knowledge, Having Knowledge, Blessing, Causing Blessing, Lord, Most Beneficent, Not Harming, Unconquerable, Truthful, All-Seeing, Healing, Creator, and Wise (or Omniscient).

Zarathushtra taught that God has seven major attributes. *Spenta Mainyu* is the Holy Spirit through which everything is created. God communicated to Zarathushtra through the *Vohu Manah* or Good Mind. *Asha Vahishta* means best order or justice. The *Khshathra Vairya*, which obviously has the same etymology as the *Kshatriya* or ruling caste of India, means Absolute Power, Desirable Dominion, and the Ultimate Paradise to be established on Earth in the end time which came to be called the kingdom or sovereignty of heaven by Jesus. *Yasna* 41:2 states, "May we be granted thy good government (*khshathra*) for ever and ever, O Wise Lord. May a good governor, whether it be a man or a woman, rule over us in the two worlds."⁵ The two worlds refer to the spiritual and material worlds. *Armaiti* means Devotion and Piety and came to be associated with the sustaining nurturing of Mother Earth. *Haurvatat* is Wholeness, Health, and Perfection. The seventh attribute *Ameretat* is Immortality.

Because God allows free choice, some spirits, who were originally created by the one God, chose badly and became Druj or the spirit of Deceit that can lead people astray. All thoughts, words, and actions have their consequences for good or bad. The *Yazata* or Adorable Ones give rewards

to the good. The Guardian Spirit of humanity is called Sraosha, who along with Mithra and Rashnu, judges the souls after death. Sraosha also has a sister called Ashi Vanguhi, which means Holy Blessing or Good Reward of Deeds. She also protects married life and guards the chastity of women, while abhorring the unfaithful wife. Mithra listens to appeals and represents contracts. He and Rashnu represent truth and light, and the sin of deceiving Mithra can even affect one's family.

For Zarathushtra fire was a symbol of the divine flame and pure truth that glows in the heart of every being. Xerxes, who found an ever-burning lamp in the temple of *Athere Polias* at Delos, spared the sanctuary out of respect for Zarathushtran fire worship. The Holy Spirit is the highest next to God, but it is opposed by the Evil Spirit and its offspring, the *daevas*, providing a constant challenge for humans to choose wisely. The human soul (*urvan*) and spirit (*fravashi*) use the faculties of knowing energy (*khratu*), wisdom and consideration (*chisti*), intelligence and perception (*ushi*), mind (*manas*), consciousness and memory (*bodha*), practical conscience (*ahu*), free will (*kama*), speech (*vachas*), and action (*shyaothna*) as well as the instrument of the living body (*tanu*). Above all these is *daena*, the gift of vision or revealed religion.

In addition to the strong mandates to tell the truth and be just, Zarathushtra also taught practical things like tilling the soil, raising grain, growing fruits, rooting out weeds, reclaiming wasteland, irrigating barren ground, and treating animals kindly, especially cows who serve farmers. He severely castigated the Turanian nomads, who after killing cattle as sacrifices went out on violent raids, destroying fields and produce.

After death the soul comes to the Bridge of the Separator, and all one's actions, words, and thoughts are evaluated in terms of good and evil. The good are able to cross the bridge into the heavenly world, but the bad fall down below. However, *Gatha* 49:11 makes it clear that Zarathushtra originally taught that such souls come back to Earth by reincarnation, though this concept was later dropped from the religion.

But among evil rulers, evil doers, evil speakers,
among evil egos, evil thinkers, and followers of Untruth,
Souls do come back by reason of dim insight;
truly they are dwellers in the Abode of Untruth.⁶

This makes sense, because Zarathushtra taught that eventually all souls will be purified and brought out of hell when the world enters a new cycle free of all evil and misery, ever young and rejoicing with all souls enjoying ineffable bliss and glory. This is also referred to as the Resurrection (*Ristakhez*), another idea that greatly influenced Judeo-Christian religion. The essence of the teachings of Zarathushtra can ultimately be summed up in three words, "BE LIKE GOD."

Through missionaries the religion of Zarathushtra spread rapidly throughout the Persian empire. Darius I shows in his own proclamations that survived in inscriptions how much he was influenced by Zarathushtra's emphasis on truth and justice. At Behistun Darius declared that Ahura Mazda helped him, because he was not disloyal and did not follow the Lie. He did not do wrong but walked in justice. He wronged neither the weak nor the powerful. He was warned not to befriend those who do wrong but punish them. In the Naqshi-i Rostama inscription Darius

praised Ahura Mazda who created the earth, sky, humans, human happiness, and who bestowed wisdom on him. He declared that the weak should not have wrong done to them by the powerful nor the reverse. He claimed that he controlled his anger by his thinking power. Darius also wrote that he rewards those who cooperate and punishes those who do harm according to the damage they have done.

Persian Empire to 500 BC

The civilization on the Iranian plateau is very ancient; copper was smelted there about 5500 BC, and Elam in the lowlands lagged only slightly behind [Sumer](#) in the development of hieroglyphic writing 5,000 years ago. However, the Elamites adopted the written language of Akkadian as the most universal language of the area for two millennia. An overlord in Susa ruled over vassal princes. The oldest written document of a treaty found so far was between the Akkadian Naram-Sin and an Elamite king about 43 centuries ago. Much of what is known about Elamite civilization comes to us from Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian records. The cities of Susa and Anshan were important links for trade and communication between Mesopotamia and the Harappan culture of the Indus valley. Elam overthrew the Third dynasty of Ur in the 21st century BC; three centuries later they were conquered by Babylon's Hammurabi, but they were able to defeat his son.

In the 17th century BC when the [Kassites](#) began to take over [Babylon](#), they also dominated Elam, as Aryans came through Iran on their way to India bringing Indo-Iranian languages in the first half of the second millennium BC. Elam clashed with Assyria in the thirteenth century BC but reached its height of power in the twelfth century BC when Shutruk-nahhunte I overthrew the Kassites in Babylon, and his son took the statue of Marduk to Susa. King Shilkhak-Inshushinak invaded Assyria as far as Ashur and besieged Babylon, establishing a brief Elamite empire which used the proto-Elamite script in its inscriptions. However, before the twelfth century was over, Babylon's Nebuchadrezzar I defeated the Elamites and took Marduk's statue back. For the next three centuries little is known of Elamite culture. Assyrian military campaigns against Elam in the eighth century BC increased in the seventh century climaxing in 639 BC when Ashurbanipal's armies destroyed Susa and sowed the land with salt. Elam continued to exist for another century but never rose to power again.

The name Iran derives from the word "Aryan," and in the first half of the first millennium BC Iranian-speaking peoples moved gradually into the area of the Zagros mountains, the largest groups being the Medes and the Persians. More effective use of iron tools and irrigation from the ninth to the seventh centuries BC enabled the Iranians to farm more successfully and increase population in the plains. The Aryans brought horses and chariots, and their use of cavalry stimulated the Assyrians to do the same. The Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III conquered and deported 65,000 Medes replacing them on the plateau with Aramaeans. Urartu led by its king Rusas I tried to fight back against the Assyrians, and the semi-legendary first king of the Medes, Daiukku, was said to have united dozens of tribal chiefs to join the effort. According to Herodotus Daiukku had been made king because of his reputation for making fair judgments. Assyria's Sargon II defeated dozens of Median chiefs and settled 30,000 captured Israelites in the towns of the Medes in the late eighth century BC. From the northwest came Scythians and Cimmerians who devastated Urartu so badly that Rusas committed suicide.

While Assyrian king Sennacherib was busy fighting Babylon, Elam, Egypt, and Judea, the Medes rallied around Khshathrita (called Phraortes by Herodotus), the son of Daiukku, and with Cimmerians as allies and Persians as vassals they attacked Nineveh in 653 BC but were defeated, and Khshathrita was killed. The Scythians took advantage of this opportunity by invading and subjugating the Medes for 28 years. Herodotus told how the next Median king Cyaxares killed the drunken Scythian chieftains at a banquet and went on to recover Median power. The prophet Nahum indicated that the growing hatred of the Assyrian nobility, priests, military, administrators, and merchants was going to bring about the downfall of that empire. Adopting the specialized military units that had been used by the Urartians and Assyrians for more than a century, the Medes marched west and took Arrapkha in 615 BC, surrounded Nineveh the next year, and then went on to take Ashur by storm. Nineveh fell in 612 BC with help from the Babylonians. The Assyrian empire was divided between the Medes and the Babylonians.

Babylon ruled over the fertile crescent, while Media controlled the north and east. The Medes came into conflict with Lydia, the major power in Asia Minor, and fought with them for five years before an eclipse of the sun stimulated them to agree to a truce mediated by Babylonians in 585 BC. That same year Astyages succeeded as Median king and ruled for 35 years. Perhaps influenced by Zarathushtra, Astyages was reluctant to engage in continual conquest and thus alienated the ambitious aristocracy. A plot of the nobles was organized by Hypargus, and border tribes were incited to rebel by Oebares and others. After Persian king Cyrus II revolted, Babylonian king Nabonidus took back Harran in 553 BC while the Medes were defeating Cyrus, who was forced to retreat. Faced with the Persian revolt and the betrayal of the aristocracy, Astyages was captured, and the royal city of Ecbatana had to submit to Cyrus, according to Ctesias because Cyrus threatened to torture his daughter Amytis, whom Cyrus later married.

Cyrus II inherited a Persian kingdom in the Median empire from his father Cambyses I in 559 BC. The mother of Cyrus was a daughter of the Median king Astyages. Herodotus, who delighted in relating stories of how oracles and dreams unexpectedly came true, wrote that because of a dream Astyages tried to have Cyrus murdered when he was a baby; but Hypargus did not want to kill him and left it to another who saved the child. When the boy was found to be acting like a king he was discovered and returned to his true mother and father. This ironic story may have been fabricated to justify Cyrus for overthrowing his grandfather.

As a vassal king in Anshan Cyrus ruled from his capital at Parsagarda and united seven Persian princes into a royal council under his leadership. Cyrus initiated diplomatic relations with Babylon's king Nabonidus and was able to win over Hypargus and much of the Median aristocracy when he revolted against Astyages and took over the Median empire in 550 BC. Cyrus bypassed the fortresses of Babylon and marched north to capture the Assyrian cities of Arbela and Ashur whose gods' statues had been taken to Babylon. Harran, the city sacred to Nabonidus, must also have fallen, as Cyrus proceeded on to invade Cilicia, Cappadocia, and Armenia. In each of these cases Cyrus allowed native kings to retain power under his rule as he established satrapies.

Croesus, who held the regional power as king of Lydia, formed an alliance with Egypt's Amasis, Babylon's Nabonidus, and the Spartans who wanted to defend the Greek city states in Asia. Believing the Delphic oracle, which declared he would destroy a great empire, Croesus refused

to be a king under Persian sovereignty. Croesus crossed the Halys River, which divided the empires, and began to devastate the Syrian lands in Cappadocia and enslave the inhabitants not driven out. The Median general Hypargus suggested placing camels in the front line which intimidated the Lydians' horses and enabled the Persians to win a victory and take Sardis after a two-week siege. Herodotus told how Croesus was saved from being burned to death by rain and a reprieve from Cyrus. The great empire Croesus destroyed was his own Lydian empire. Croesus blamed Apollo for his defeat, saying, "No one is fool enough to choose war instead of peace - in peace sons bury fathers, but in war fathers bury sons."⁷ Yet he had chosen war.

Since Miletus was the only Greek city state to surrender, the others were conquered by the Persian army led by Hypargus; then the islanders surrendered. Cyrus once again was able to use local disaffection for another easy victory over a Mesopotamian power, this time Babylon, winning over their general Gobryas, who took Uruk in 546 and Babylon in 539 BC and become satrap of the new province of Babirush. Nabonidus was severely criticized by Persian propaganda, and the Akkadian gods were returned to their temples, as Cyrus tried to legitimize his taking the kingship of Babylon. Business went on without much change under Persian rule, but the Jews were allowed to return to their homeland under generous conditions that allowed them to take the precious utensils that had been stolen from their temple a half century before by the Babylonians. Cyrus had been heralded as the Lord's anointed by Jewish prophets.

Cyrus also expanded the Persian empire greatly in the east to the edge of India; but if he was influenced by the new religion of Zarathushtra, it did not quell his desire for imperial conquest. Near the Jaxartes River he ran into the Massagetae led by Queen Tomyris who sent him the following message:

King of the Medes, I advise you to abandon this enterprise,
for you cannot know if in the end it will do you any good.
Rule your own people, and try to bear the sight of me ruling mine.
But of course you will refuse my advice;
as the last thing you wish for is to live in peace.⁸

In 529 BC a bloody battle was fought, destroying most of the Persian army and killing Cyrus.

Eight years before he died Cyrus had made his son Cambyses king of Babylon, while a second son Bardiya administered the eastern provinces. When Cambyses II succeeded his father, he had his brother Bardiya secretly assassinated and then invaded [Egypt](#). With the advice of a defecting Greek general, Cambyses was able to get Bedouin help in crossing the desert. In a battle, in which Greek mercenaries fought on both sides, the Egyptian forces of Psamtik III fled to Memphis, which then fell to the Persians. From [Egypt](#) Cambyses tried to attack Carthage, but his Phoenician allies refused to fight against their own colony. According to Herodotus, a venture against a Libyan oasis failed because of a sandstorm. Cambyses did manage to invade Nubia, but the Persians suffered great losses on their return. Greek accounts of Cambyses' atrocities in Egypt probably reflect Egyptian resentment for the Persian domination they suffered until 402 BC. In 522 BC a man saying he was Bardiya rose up and tried to rule in Persia, and Cambyses headed home but died on the way.

Darius, a prince and governor of Parthia who had commanded the ten thousand immortals against [Egypt](#), led a group of seven Persian nobles, maintained control of the army, and put down the revolt, killing the false Bardiya two months after the death of Cambyses, though it took two years to put down the various revolts in the empire. Darius sent forces led by Otanes to help Syloson, the exiled brother of Polycrates, to retake the island of Samos. He appointed Zerubbabel governor of Judah, and when the order of Cyrus to restore the temple was discovered, Darius supported that project. In 519 BC Darius himself crossed the Caspian Sea and led the invasion of the eastern Scythians, and the following winter he marched to Egypt where he sought wise men and reinstated the former Egyptian laws. He also ordered the digging of a canal 150 feet wide from the Nile River to the Gulf of Suez.

After seizing a great empire Darius endeavored to judge it by establishing laws. The empire was divided into twenty provinces, each ruled by a Persian satrap and a commander-in-chief. The Persians were exempted from taxation, and India's gold provided nearly a third of the total annual tribute valued at 14,500 talents of silver. Inspectors called "the ears of the king" kept him informed and had their own armed forces. The laws were intended to keep the stronger from destroying the weak. Judges were appointed for life unless they were removed for miscarriage of justice. Darius claimed that he loved what is right and hated lies and what is wrong, that he was not angry but restrained those who were angry. Those who injured he punished. Those who did not speak the truth he did not trust, believing that anyone who lies destroys. He even withdrew a death sentence when he realized that he had violated his own law not to execute anyone for only one crime, but in weighing the man's services against his crime ended up making him a governor. However, the death penalty was used for offenses against the state or the royal family, and mutilation was common for lesser crimes.

Darius encouraged trade and economic development in a number of ways. He standardized weights and measures and coinage on a bimetallic system of gold and silver that had been introduced by Croesus in Lydia. Darius created a network of roads including a royal highway from Susa to Sardis in Lydia. He commended the satrap of Asia Minor and Syria for transplanting fruit trees from beyond the Euphrates. Sesame spread to [Egypt](#), and rice was planted in Mesopotamia. Generally large estates were worked by serfs and war-captured slaves who belonged to the land. Industry not only produced luxury goods made from precious metals, but also trade of useful tools, household products, and inexpensive clothing raised the living standards of many people. However, the empire did have to be supported, and there were taxes on ports, internal trade, and sales as well as on estates, fields, gardens, flocks, and mines. The wages of skilled workers, laborers, and even women and children were strictly regulated.

The Indus valley had been subdued and made into the satrapy of Hindush by 513 BC when Darius crossed the Bosphorus and led an attack against the European Scythians. With the vassal help of hundreds of Greek ships the Persians defeated the Getae and got the Thracians to submit. However, the Scythians destroyed their own land and while retreating harassed the Persian army with arrows from horsemen. King Darius fled back to Asia but left behind 800,000 soldiers led by Megabazus, satrap of Dascyleium, to continue the fighting. The next year Libya was conquered after a nine-month siege of Barca, while Megabazus was taking the towns of Thrace one by one and deporting their warriors to Phrygia. Envoys demanded of Macedonia's Amyntas earth and water, the sign of submission, and he complied. Darius appointed his brother

Artaphrenes satrap in Sardis to oversee the Greek cities of Ionia, and he replaced Megabazus with Otanes, who controlled the grain trade through the straits, cutting off the Scythians from Greek art treasures, Milesian business, and threatening the food supply of the European Greeks. Megabazus strengthened this blockade by capturing the islands of Lemnos and Imbros.

Persian-Greek Wars

In 500 BC the Greek Ionian cities revolted and burned Sardis. The war went on sporadically until the Persians defeated the Greek fleet off Miletus in 494 BC. Most of the men in Miletus were killed, and the women and children were enslaved. The next spring Chios, Lesbos, and Tenedos were taken along with mainland cities. Handsome boys were made eunuchs, and beautiful girls were put in the royal harem. Cities and temples were burned. Only the historian Hecataeus, who had opposed the revolt, was spared. The Ionian cities that had been allowed local autonomy before were now brought under imperial administration. Private wars between cities were no longer allowed but were arbitrated. A census was taken, and the taxation imposed on the weakened cities was burdensome. Darius appointed his son-in-law Mardonius, who according to Herodotus ejected irresponsible despots from Ionian cities and set up democracies. The Persians took gold-rich Thasos even though it had not been hostile, after which much of the Persian fleet and over 20,000 men were destroyed by a storm off Athos. At the same time a Thracian tribe of Brygi inflicted heavy losses on the Persian army on land while wounding Mardonius, who eventually subdued them before retreating to Asia.

In 490 BC Darius sent envoys to Greek cities demanding the earth and water of submission. The trading island of Aegina cooperated, but Sparta and Athens were determined to resist. The Persian attack was led by Datis. When the people of Naxos fled to the interior, the city was burned. Eretrians were divided but decided only to defend themselves, not to attack. After the Persians had assaulted Eretria for six days, two democrats betrayed the city hoping their party would gain power; but the Persians made the moral mistake of destroying the temples and enslaving the people. This stimulated the Athenians to attack the Persians on the plain of Marathon, defeating them so badly that the Persians fled for home.

In [Egypt](#) where graft had been rampant, Darius instituted a new code of laws. Suffering under a heavy Persian garrison and severe taxes, Egyptians complained that the great building projects in Persepolis, Susa, and Ecbatana had been financed by Egyptian wealth. The Egyptian satrap Aryandes was executed for violating Persian coining laws, probably for melting down royal coins with the king's image and selling the bullion at an enormous profit, which was considered treason. Upset by the heavy taxation imposed to raise money for the war against Greece, in 486 BC a revolt erupted in [Egypt](#) and was soon followed by the death of Darius.

His oldest son by Queen Atossa, Xerxes, who had been administering Babylon as viceroy for twelve years, became King of the Persians and the Medes and spent his first royal year putting down the Egyptian revolt. Xerxes inflicted more severe treatment than his predecessors had there and also in Babylon after their satrap Zopyrus was killed in a revolt in 482 BC that was ruthlessly defeated. Not only were the Babylonian fortifications demolished and the temples destroyed, but the great, solid-gold statue of Marduk was removed and melted down. No longer could anyone take the hand of Bel to show their divine-approved rulership at the Babylonian

New Year's festival. Babylon was incorporated into the Assyrian satrapy, which had to provide a thousand talents of silver and 500 boys for eunuchs. Even the name Babylonian was banned, and after this time they were known as Chaldeans.

Urged on by the war party led by Mardonius, Xerxes amassed a huge army formed from 46 nations and commanded by 29 Persian generals to launch an attack against Greece. Gold raiment marked the 10,000 immortals, elite Persian and Median soldiers allowed to bring their concubines and servants on the march. The navy of 1200 ships was mostly furnished by the Phoenicians, Egyptians, Anatolians, and by Dorian, Aeolian, and Ionian Greeks. Half of the Persian imperial army was used - about 180,000 men. So confident were they that when they caught three men in Sardis spying for the Greek allies, they showed them the vast army and let them go make their report.

However, the Persians suffered losses when they met determined resistance from 300 Spartans at the Thermopylae pass, though eventually the Spartans were killed, and the Thebans surrendered and were branded. The army of Xerxes then burned deserted Plataea and Thespieae before entering Athens and burning the acropolis. In the major naval battle at Salamis the imperial navy lost 200 ships, the Greek allies only 40. Xerxes reacted by executing the Phoenician captains, causing the Phoenicians and Egyptians to go home. Xerxes then went back to Sardis, leaving Mardonius in command. At Plataea both armies had been promised victory by seers if they stayed on the defensive. Mardonius refused to retire and use bribery. When the allies were withdrawing, which might have broken up the coalition, the Persians attacked, causing the desperate Greeks to fight. Mardonius himself entered the battle and was slain along with his guard of a thousand Persians. This and news of the Persian defeat at the island of Mycale caused the imperial army to retire from Europe.

Xerxes retired to his harem and used bribery and diplomacy to try to win over the Greeks, who formed the Delian league led by Athens which attacked Thrace in 476 BC, driving Persian imperialism out of Europe except at Doriscus. Xerxes in his romantic affairs aroused the jealousy of the queen, who at the New Year's feast requested the woman be mutilated. The victim's family fled and was going to raise a revolt, but they were overtaken and killed. Another Achaemenid prince violated a virgin from a prominent family and was ordered to circumnavigate Africa; but when he returned without matching the Phoenician feat, he was impaled. In 466 BC two hundred Greek ships invaded Caria and shot arrows into besieged Phasaelis, persuading them to pay ten talents and join the war to liberate Greek cities. Xerxes sent a navy, but eighty ships were delayed at Cyprus and captured after the battle at the Eurymedon. The Persian threat against Europe had been replaced by Greek influence in Asia Minor.

In 465 BC Xerxes was assassinated in the royal bedchamber by a conspiracy led by Artabanus, Megabyzus, and the eunuch chamberlain Aspamitres. Artabanus was able to persuade 18-year-old Artaxerxes that his older brother Darius, who hated Xerxes for seducing his wife, had killed their father, causing Artaxerxes to murder his brother Darius. When Artabanus tried to get rid of Artaxerxes, he was betrayed by Megabyzus and killed after wounding the young king. The eunuch Aspamitres was tortured to death. Hystaspis, another brother of the new king, revolted in Bactria and was defeated by Artaxerxes, who then made sure that all his brothers were killed. Artaxerxes ruled the Persian empire for forty years collecting annual taxes that totalled about

10,000 talents plus nearly half as much again from India. Little value from this ever went back to the satrapies that provided it except in payment to imperial soldiers from their countries. Taxes were so heavy that many had to borrow money at 40% interest until they were ruined and lost their land to the original owners, who were also being taxed. Many revolts resulted from this oppression.

In Egypt Inaros, a son of Psamtik of the Saite line, drove out the tax collectors and requested aid from Athens in 460 BC. The satrap Achaemenes was killed, and most of Memphis was taken. While this revolt continued, Ezra was given permission by Artaxerxes to take the written law of the Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem. Persian money aided Sparta in defeating Athens at Tanagra in 457 BC, and a pacified Judah allowed safe passage of the Persian army led by Syrian satrap Megabyzus on its way to Egypt where it drove the Athenians out of Memphis, capturing 6,000 Greeks. Inaros and the Greeks were taken to Persia, and several years later the queen ordered him and fifty Greeks executed. Some Greeks were still holding out in the Nile Delta when Cimon of Athens attacked Cyprus with 200 ships, but the Persians successfully resisted this and the ships that were sent to Egypt.

In 449 BC a peace treaty was made between Athens and Persia which confirmed what had been the situation before the long war. Persia acknowledged the autonomy of the Greek cities in Asia, while the Athenians renounced attempts to liberate others there as long as the Persian king would recognize the autonomy of his vassal Greek cities and their low tribute amount from before the war. A demilitarized zone was proclaimed around the borders between the two empires. Athens also agreed not to support rebellions in Egypt and Libya. However, when the queen had the Greeks and Inaros executed, Megabyzus, upset that his pledge had been violated, revolted in Syria. After redeeming his honor in two victories against the empire, Megabyzus agreed to return to loyalty provided he remain satrap. This Syrian revolt may have stimulated rebellious feelings in Jerusalem where the walls were being rebuilt. Artaxerxes ordered this building stopped and the work destroyed, but later his cupbearer Nehemiah with the help of wine persuaded the king to allow him to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the city, and Nehemiah was even given an armed guard for his journey.

Herodotus recited his *History* in Athens in 445 BC, as Pericles made a thirty years' peace with Sparta and moved toward challenging the Persian empire by accepting a large present of gold and grain from Libyan rebel Psamtik and establishing tribute districts from cities in Caria, Ionia, Hellespont, and the islands. When democratic Miletus appealed to Athens after having been defeated by oligarchic Samos, Pericles in 441 BC sent an expedition to re-establish the democracy. The oligarchs driven out turned to Pisouthnes, the satrap of Sardis, who allowed 700 mercenaries to be hired to recover the island and capture the Greek garrison for the satrap. Samos, however, was taken over by the Athenians when Phoenician ships failed to defend it. Thus the peace treaty was broken. Persia regained some cities, and Pericles countered with imperial gains in the Black Sea area.

Megabyzus, who on a hunt had saved Artaxerxes from a charging lion, was exiled for killing an animal before his master, and his son Zopyrus aided by Athenians assaulted Caunus and was killed. Megabyzus eventually was invited back to the king's table; but when he died, his wife

Amytis, the king's sister, became the mistress of a Greek physician, who when it was discovered was buried alive for polluting the royal blood, Amytis dying the same day.

Jews complained of the Persian taxes, but Nehemiah who as governor was supported by the imperial bureaucracy, blamed the rich Jews and said he loaned money without interest. Nehemiah's criticism of the wealthy probably led to his recall by Artaxerxes in 433 BC, but he returned to Jerusalem again to institute reforms such as forbidding commerce on the Sabbath. Meanwhile a plague spread from Ethiopia through Egypt and into Athens and the Persian empire that further oppressed the overtaxed. The Persian court sent the great beauty Thargelia and courtesans to gather information from lusty Athenian statesmen.

When Artaxerxes and his queen died on the same day in 424 BC, Xerxes II became king but was killed a month and a half later while sleeping after heavy drinking at a festival. Secydianus, the assassin, was a son of Artaxerxes by a Babylonian concubine; but he was replaced by a different Babylonian concubine's son, who raised an army in Babylon and declared himself Darius II, promising Secydianus half the kingdom but half a year later causing his death; other conspirators in the assassination of the king were put to death or committed suicide. His sister and wife Parysatis became an influential queen especially on behalf of Cyrus, who was the next son born to them. Darius II began by renewing the treaty with the Athenians, but continued imperial taxation caused more fields to go out of cultivation and only be used for grazing.

In 413 BC Pisouthnes in Sardis revolted; Persian forces led by Tissaphernes compelled him to surrender, and Darius II ordered him killed. When Darius' own son Amorges rebelled in Caria with Athenian aid, Darius decided to help the Spartans fight the Athenians. Governing Sardis now, Tissaphernes started collecting taxes from the Greek cities and offered to support Spartan troops in Asia. Clazomenae, Teos, Lebedos, Ephesus, Phocaea, and Cyrene accepted Persian garrisons and paid their owed tribute. Persia signed a treaty with Sparta through Tissaphernes, agreeing to wage war together against Athens. However, in Sparta politicians refused to ratify a treaty that recognized Persian territory that had belonged to ancestors of the Persian king. When the Spartan ambassador Lichas demanded this change in 411 BC, Tissaphernes left in a rage. Meanwhile the Athenian Alcibiades, who had gone over to the Spartan side, persuaded Tissaphernes to delay most payments to the Spartans, because a triumphant Sparta would challenge Persian imperialism. In a third treaty Sparta acknowledged Persian taxes in Asia while excluding them from Europe and the islands, and Tissaphernes agreed to pay for Spartan ships. Miletus and Cnidus reacted to this Spartan abandonment by driving the Persian garrisons out.

Darius II had to contend with a revolt by the Medes which he put down and palace intrigues that included a eunuch who tried to make himself king but failed. In [Egypt](#) a revolt was motivated by the desire to destroy the Jewish temple at Elephantine that was offensive because of its animal sacrifices. In 409 BC the Athenians invaded Asia and burned the grain in Lydia. The queen got her 16-year-old son Cyrus appointed commander of the Persian forces in Asia Minor, and he began paying Sparta what had been promised; but he kept the Spartan general Callicratidas waiting two days while he drank. Cyrus also had two sons of the king's sister executed for showing their hands in his presence. Recalled to his ill father, Cyrus turned his money over to Lysander which enabled the Spartans to win the battle at Aegospotami and cut off grain supplies from Russia, starving Athens into surrender in 404 BC.

By the time Darius II had died in 404 BC [Egypt](#) had revolted and was lost to the Persian empire. Artaxerxes II began his rule by cruelly executing Udiastes for having assassinated Teriteuchmes. Cyrus was caught plotting to murder the new king at his coronation; but their mother pleaded for her favorite, and Cyrus was allowed to return to his satrapy. Cyrus was able to win over the Ionian cities abandoned by the Spartans except for Miletus, which was held by Tissaphernes after they banished their aristocrats. The exiles were received by Pharnabazus, giving Cyrus a reason to gather an army that included 13,000 Greek mercenaries to besiege Miletus. As Cyrus and his army headed east, the mercenaries demanded more money. At Cunaxa near Babylon Cyrus met the Persian army that might otherwise have been used to reconquer [Egypt](#). Cyrus wounded Artaxerxes but was then killed. The next year the queen-mother Parysatis poisoned Queen Stateira and was banished to her native Babylon, but later the forgiving Artaxerxes recalled his mother.

Tissaphernes succeeded Cyrus as margrave of Anatolia, but ungrateful Sparta, roused by accounts of the ten thousand mercenaries' escape from Persia, sent Thibron to liberate Asian Greek cities. He incorporated into his army the mercenaries, who had made it to the Black Sea after their generals were killed. Accused of allowing his troops to plunder their allies, Thibron was replaced by Dercylidas, who made a truce with Tissaphernes and attacked Pharnabazus, who was supported by the Dardanian widow Mania and her Greek mercenaries until she was murdered by her son-in-law Meidias, who allied himself with Spartan Dercylidas and used Mania's treasure to pay 8,000 soldiers for a year. The Spartan army plundered Bithynia, and agreeing to another truce Pharnabazus returned to the king to urge a naval war. Five hundred ships were to be built at Cyprus and put under the command of Athenian admiral Conon and the satrap.

The Spartans marched into Caria, but Tissaphernes and Pharnabazus joined together to defend it and then attacked Ionia; then these two satraps and Dercylidas agreed to a truce for a year. In 396 BC Spartan king Agesilaus himself arrived and, after a three-month truce which enabled Tissaphernes to send for reinforcements, was ordered to leave Asia. With Caria defended, Agesilaus invaded Phrygia and captured towns of Pharnabazus, whose attacks were avoided by using captives as screens. While Pharnabazus sent Persian money to stir up rebellion against Sparta in Europe, Agesilaus defeated Tissaphernes and captured their camels, the Greeks plundering much unprotected land. Forgiven and plotting once again, Parysatis arranged to have Tithraustes sent to murder Tissaphernes which was accomplished by Ariaaios and his men.

Since Agesilaus would not leave Asia without instructions from home, Tithraustes gave him 30 talents to invade Pharnabazus' satrapy of Hellespontine Phrygia again. Pharnabazus reacted by confiscating the property of Tissaphernes and giving 220 talents to the Athenian Conon. Tithraustes provided another 700 talents to his generals Ariaaios and Pasiphernes for diplomatic maneuvering. By these bribes and diplomatic machinations the Greek cities of Asia were garrisoned by Persian money. Conon had to fight off mercenaries at Cyprus and then went to the winter palace at Babylon to get funds from Artaxerxes II. After ravaging Phrygia, Agesilaus was recalled to Sparta; he said it was because of the king's ten thousand golden archers, by which he meant the gold coins used for diplomacy. Obviously we know more about this west side of the Persian empire and these long wars because of [Greek](#) sources; yet the lack of business

documents in this period may be because of the devastation and looting in these wars which accomplished little except destruction.

In 394 BC the Persian navy manned by Phoenicians and Greeks defeated the Spartan navy off Cnidus. The old alliance of Persia and Athens established democracies in numerous Asian cities under the auspices of the Persian empire. Only Abydos and Sestos resisted. The Persians and Athenians even ravaged European Laconia and established a Persian garrison on the island of Cythera threatening the Peloponnese. The allies at Corinth were given money, and the walls of Athens were rebuilt by Conon. However, the new satrap of Sardis from Armenia, Tiribazus, now feared the [Athenian Empire](#) and had Conon imprisoned and secretly gave money to Antalcidas to build up the Spartan navy. At a peace conference in Sparta, representatives of Athens, Thebes, Corinth, and Argos agreed on a treaty, but Athens rejected it by denouncing and banishing their delegates. At the same time Tiribazus was replaced by Struthas as satrap of Ionia, and he sided with Athens against Sparta. Thibron returned from Ephesus and resumed the war; but he was slain by Struthas at a discus game, and his army was devastated by the Persian cavalry. However, Thibron's successor Diphridas held some cities loyal to Sparta and got money for mercenaries by ransoming the daughter of Struthas and her husband Tigranes.

In all this confusion many rulers showed their independence by issuing coins, including Euagoras of Cyprus, Milkyaton of Citium, Hecatomnus of Caria, and Autophradates of Lycia. Autophradates and Hecatomnus were ordered to put down the rebellion of Euagoras, while the Spartan governor of Abydos regained Aeolian cities from Pharnabazus. Athenians assisted Euagoras and replaced Milkyaton and his coins. Athens even allied itself with [Egypt](#), stimulating Artaxerxes to change sides again and to replace both Autophradates and Struthas with the pro-Spartan Tiribazus. Sparta responded by sending Antalcidas from Ephesus to Susa to meet the king. Then Tiribazus and Antalcidas used Spartan and Syracusan fleets to destroy the Athenians guarding the Hellespont, threatening Athens with the same starvation that ended the Peloponnesian War seventeen years before. Delegates soon gathered at Sardis in 386 BC and agreed to the King's Peace named after Antalcidas in which Persia retained the cities in Asia and the islands of Clazomenae and Cyprus, except that Lemnos, Lesbos, and Scyros would belong to Athens as they had before. The Persian empire had lost [Egypt](#), but they had retained Asia.

Imperial taxation was still oppressive, stimulating many revolts and uprisings by workers that were often put down by local tyrants, while newly minted coins indicated a growing wealthy class and economic development. Barred by the peace treaty from helping Cyprus, Athenian mercenaries led by Chabrias went to defend [Egypt](#), which thus was able to resist for three years and turn away the long delayed Persian invasion to regain [Egypt](#), while Euagoras of Cyprus allied himself with Egypt and invaded Cilicia and Phoenicia, capturing Tyre. The Persian army led by Aroandas (Orontes) regained Cilicia and invaded Cyprus to restore Milkyaton at Citium. With the help of pirates Euagoras tried to cut off their food, causing a mutiny by the Ionian mercenaries which was put down; but after losing a naval battle Euagoras had to submit, asking to be treated as a king, which was denied in 380 BC, the same year Isocrates tried and failed to raise a crusade against the Persians at the Olympic games.

When Pharnabazus complained that Chabrias' mercenary activity in Egypt violated the treaty, Athens recalled him on pain of death. Though Tiribazus was winning over mercenaries with

money, the rivalry of Aroandas caused Artaxerxes II to have Tiribazus arrested; but Aroandas had to accept the terms of Euagoras at Cyprus that Tiribazus had rejected. The Cadusian revolt was so nearby that Artaxerxes took the field himself; after much suffering, a peace was made, and the Persian king only escaped on foot. Out of this frustration Artaxerxes had several nobles executed for disloyalty. With Cypress settled Pharnabazus prepared to invade [Egypt](#) again and enlisted Athenian general Iphicrates to lead the Greek mercenaries. In Asia Bithynia was independent, and Hecatomnus passed on his rulership of Caria to his son Mausolus in 377 BC. Three years later Artaxerxes imposed another treaty on the Greeks and with the younger [Dionysius](#) of Syracuse.

By 373 BC Pharnabazus had gathered 300 triremes, 12,000 Greeks, and countless Persians and easterners. They landed on the Delta, but unable to take Memphis had to retreat from the flooding Nile to Asia. In 371 BC Thebes won a big victory over Sparta at Leuctra and refused to accept the latest King's Peace. A year later Jason of Pherae, who united Thessaly and aimed at conquering Persia, was assassinated. The king's money was also used to contribute to the famed oracle at Delphi, but Thebes still refused to accept the imperial terms.

Within the Persian empire revolts led by Datames and Ariobarzanes were breaking out. Needing the loyalty of Carian satrap Mausolus, Artaxerxes II punished envoys who had complained about Mausolus. When Aroandas felt he had been demoted from Armenia to Mysia, he accepted the leadership of the coalition of revolting satraps. Ordered to send tribute, Mausolus merely collected more money for himself. Aroandas' presence in Syria stimulated more rebellions there and among Lycians, Pisidians, Pamphylians, and Cilicians; even Autophradates joined him, and Artabazus was imprisoned. The Persian empire had lost half its revenues.

Djedhor, the new king of [Egypt](#) in 361 BC, known to the Greeks as Tachos, seized on this opportunity and, with the help of rivals Agesilaus of Sparta and Chabrias of Athens, joined the revolted satraps and invaded Palestine and Phoenicia. However, his brother in [Egypt](#) used resentment against taxes to put forth as king of [Egypt](#) his son Nekht-har-hebi, who had joined the satrap revolt in Syria. All kinds of rebellions were breaking out, and Nekht-har-hebi was forced by the feudal chiefs to abandon Asian conquest and return to [Egypt](#), where he was saved from a siege by Agesilaus; but when his uncle Tachos was captured by the Persian prince Ochus and died on his return to Egypt to be a vassal king for Artaxerxes, Nekht-har-hebi ended up ruling [Egypt](#) from 359 to 340 BC. All this enabled the army of Artaxerxes to slowly advance and cross the Euphrates, and Aroandes, abandoned by the Egyptians, returned to loyalty and surrendered the other rebels with him. Autophradates also freed Artabazus and came to terms with the empire. Then Aroandes and Artabazus fought the mercenaries, and Datames was eventually murdered at a conference of the revolting satraps by Mithridates, who had also betrayed his own father Ariobarzanes to crucifixion.

Darius, the oldest son of Artaxerxes II by Queen Stateira, was executed for plotting with fifty of the king's sons by concubines to kill their father. Ochus, the youngest son of the queen, persuaded his only other brother of the queen to take poison, because he thought his father was angry at him. Arsames, another son, beloved by Artaxerxes for his wisdom, was also murdered, and the king soon died of grief in 359 BC after ruling the Persian empire for 45 years. Ochus became Artaxerxes III and ruthlessly had his relatives killed regardless of age or sex. He ordered

the satraps in Asia Minor to get rid of their mercenaries, causing Artabazus to revolt and appeal to Athens when an army of 20,000 was raised against him in Phrygia. In 356 BC Mausolus organized a confederacy with Rhodes, Chios, Cos, Erythrae, and Byzantium, his coins showing himself as a Heracleian leader. Artabazus got 5,000 mercenaries from Thebes, but sensing treachery from agents bribed by the king, he fled to Philip in Macedonia. Aroandes, who had joined his revolt, held out for a while in Lydia but eventually came to terms again. Mausolus, whose magnificent funeral sculptures in Halicarnassus his wealth financed coined the word mausoleum, died in 353 BC.

Ochus spent a year campaigning in [Egypt](#), but once again the Persian army had to retire in 350 BC. However, seven years later as the captives taken at Sidon entered Babylon and Susa, Egypt finally fell to the Persian reconquest that was supported by 10,000 Greek mercenaries. Nekht-har-hebi retreated to Ethiopia and claimed to rule from there. The Greeks and Persians fought over the spoils, and Ochus carried off the leading Egyptians to Persia.

In 338 BC while [Philip](#) of Macedonia was on his way to defeating the Athenians and Thebans at Charoneia, Ochus was poisoned by his physician by order of the eunuch Bagoas. Arses, the son of Ochus, became king and refused to pay reparations to [Philip](#) for Persia's having helped Perinthus. So [Philip](#) led a Greek crusade to liberate all the Greek cities under Persian domination. Arses tried to poison Bagoas, but was poisoned himself, and all his children were killed. Bagoas found a 45-year-old Achaemenid noble remaining he made Darius III but, trying to poison him too, had at last to drink his own brew.

Philip's assassination was blamed on the king of Persia by his son [Alexander](#). Macedonian troops already in Asia were defeated by the Persian fleet at Magnesia, and Darius III was able to put down a revolt in [Egypt](#). In 334 BC Alexander's army crossed the Hellespont into Asia at the same place Xerxes' army had come the other way 146 years before. The Greeks won a narrow victory over the Persian army at Granicus. Persians who surrendered were sent home, but Alexander had most of the captured Greek mercenaries slaughtered, sending the rest to Macedonia as slaves. Halicarnassus was burned during a siege. Alexander replaced the Persian satrap, general, and treasurer of each conquered province with Macedonians. At Issus the Greeks met the army of Darius, who fled. Parmenio then took Damascus, the Persian baggage train, and the rest of the royal family. The Phoenician cities surrendered to the Greeks except Tyre, which was destroyed after a seven-month siege. After taking Gaza, where he was wounded, [Alexander](#) was welcomed by the Egyptians glad to be rid of the hated Persians.

Offered half the empire by Darius III, [Alexander](#) refused and crossed the Euphrates and Tigris rivers unopposed. The two armies met again at Gaugamela in 331 BC, and once again Darius deserted his army. [Alexander](#) entered Babylon and ordered the temple of Bel that had been destroyed by Xerxes rebuilt. The major capital of Susa surrendered to the Greeks without resisting, and the immense treasure accumulated by the Persian empire was found in the palace. [Alexander](#) began to train Persians by his new military methods. More treasure was found at the other main capital at Persepolis, where the men were killed, the women were enslaved, and the city was burned, perhaps in revenge for the burning of Athens. [Alexander](#) then went east in pursuit of the viceroy of Bactria who had imprisoned Darius, and by 330 BC Darius was dead and [Alexander](#) ruled over his former empire. Uncooperative satraps were punished; others were

retained by [Alexander](#), who founded numerous cities named after himself. Two years were spent in putting down the resistance of the Sogdians in the north. [Alexander](#) went as far as India before his troops demanded to return; by 324 BC they were back in Susa.

[Alexander](#) married the daughter of Darius III and had 10,000 of his men marry Persian girls, hoping to breed an army for his new empire. He was already treating Persians equally with Greeks and using them in his army, and the Persian nobility was being educated by Greek teachers. The Persian treasure was coined as money and distributed. Warned that if he entered Babylon he would die, Alexander finally did and succumbed to an illness in 323 BC. The immense empire was divided and ruled by the Greek generals of the armies who had conquered it. The Persian empire was no more, and the Hellenistic era had begun.

Notes

1. tr. Stephanie Dalley in *Myths from Mesopotamia*, p. 285.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 287.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 303-304.
4. Kuhrt, Amélie *The Ancient Near East c. 3000-330 BC*, p. 612-613.
5. Zaehner, R. C., *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*, p. 74.
6. *The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra* tr. Irach J. S. Taraporewala, *Yasna* 49:11, p. 727.
7. *Herodotus* tr. Aubrey de Sélincourt, p. 49.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 96.